United Nations A/CONF.226/PC.3/3

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 June 2016

Original: English

Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)
Third session
Surabaya, Indonesia, 25-27 July 2016

Habitat III thematic meeting on smart civic engagement

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) hereby transmits the outcome document of the Habitat III thematic meeting on smart civic engagement, held in Tel Aviv on 7 September 2015.

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Outcome document of the Habitat III thematic meeting on smart civic engagement

An urban world

Reaffirming urban democracy

1. As you entered the agora of ancient Athens, you were transformed from farmer, landowner, artisan, priest or soldier into an active citizen. This was the democratic arena of the city, the place where open public discussion guided the life of the city, where policies were made, strategies debated and decisions voted upon. Our cities have practically been reinvented since the days of ancient Athens, but the essence of urban life is still defined by the scope of the involvement and engagement of its citizens. What does the agora of the twenty-first century look like? In the following section we will outline the key aspects of the new frontiers for urban democracy worldwide, illustrating the scope of participation, the diffusion of technology as a democratic tool and the concerns that outline the new frontiers.

Introduction

2. In October 2016, the United Nations will hold the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), in Quito, Ecuador, to reinvigorate global commitment to sustainable urbanization. The Conference will focus on the definition and implementation of a transformative New Urban Agenda, effectively harnessing the role of urbanization as a driving force and source of development, with the power to change and improve lives.

3. The Sustainable Development Goals have been set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which states that:

> "We the peoples" are the celebrated opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. It is "we the peoples" who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community — and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people — and this, we believe, will ensure its success.

4. The new Sustainable Development Goals also recognize that sustainable urban development and management are crucial to quality of life. We will work with local authorities and communities to renew and plan our cities and human settlements so as to foster community cohesion and personal security and stimulate innovation and employment. We will reduce the negative impacts of urban activities and chemicals that are hazardous to human health and the environment, including through the environmentally sound management and safe use of chemicals, the reduction and recycling of waste and more efficient use of water and energy. We will also work to minimize the impact of cities on the global climate system. We will take into account population trends and projections in our national, rural and urban development strategies and policies. We look forward to the upcoming Habitat III conference.

5. The Habitat III issue paper on smart cities[1] outlines the key drivers for action for pursuing a smart city framework:

> Strategic policies, legislations, rules and regulations: Smart and sustainable cities have to be planned, designed, implemented, and managed effectively. Also, the benefits of smart cities are not automatic. These require strategic policies and innovative thinking about 21st century technological advancements in the sustainable urbanization agenda. More, it is important that the development of a smart city is understood not as the final aim of city administrators, but as a way to reduce costs of public services, enhance access to and quality of these services, enhance regulatory compliance, and help enhance the transparency and accountability of public agencies. All these require smart governance that recognize complementary assets and linkages of urban and rural areas, advance partnerships and bottom up approaches inclusive of stakeholders.
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> Innovative, responsive urban planning and design: Planning and design from the planned city extension perspective focuses on: public space layout that minimizes transport needs and service delivery costs while optimizing the use of land; street patterns that enhance mobility and space for civic and economic activities; open spaces that provide areas for recreation and social interaction enhancing quality of life; and, block typology that facilitates private investment in defined and serviced areas. There is a need to re-evaluate existing approaches and instruments, identify good practices suited to local contexts, ensure alignment with international standards, and promote integrated approaches across government ministries and sectors (transportation and communication networks, green buildings, inclusive and efficient human settlements and service delivery systems, improved air and water quality, disaster preparedness and response toward urban resilience).
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> Robust financial planning: Smart city approaches require robust financial planning and investments, thus need to be informed by knowledge anchored in local context. This requires inclusive governance marked by stakeholder engagement — harmonizing public and private sector priorities and ensuring civil society participation, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, in local public decision-making processes. Financial models also need to be well designed, focused on cost-effective and sustainable solutions and conducive to foreign investment. This aspect focuses on developing a realistic and implementable financial plan that is crucial to the successful implementation of planned city extensions and infill (PCE/I).
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> Coherence: There is need for international consensus on what "smart and sustainable city" means, and deeper understanding of how approaches labelled as "smart" advance the new urban agenda. The assumption that the application of ICTs in planning, design and management of urbanization and cities will automatically result in improved outcomes needs to be addressed. This is a long-term process and cannot be achieved overnight. Transitioning or building a city into a smarter, more resilient, more sustainable city is a journey and every city is likely to have different pathways. This is a long-term process of actions that would not only allow for comparability but would also promote

[1] Available at: http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-21_Smart-Cities-2.0.pdf.

sustainable development along with each city being able to quantify improvements. Cities are accountable for continuous improvement to strengthen its effectiveness for the future. Therefore the process should be able to adapt to the dynamic, evolving and complex nature of cities and be able to continuously update the vision as required.

6. We acknowledge the following:

(a) Winds of urbanization: 2 per cent, 50 per cent, 70 per cent and 80 per cent — these four numbers portray the unique place in history that we currently occupy. Only 2 per cent of the planet is urban, however, this space contains more than 50 per cent of the world's population, creating more than 70 per cent of our economic benefits and 80 per cent of the pollution. Cities have become the core of humanity's well-being and its hope for tomorrow, a sustainable, just and happy future. Urban areas are a living combination of history, civilization, diversity and culture. Urbanization has been a force that has changed almost everything, including ways of thinking, acting and using space, lifestyles, social and economic relations and consumption and production patterns;

(b) Cities need to develop sustainable mechanisms that will enable their citizens to develop capacity and experience in civic responsibility in order to broaden democratic platforms and responsible governance. This is a twofold challenge, for the city to again become a democratic arena and for the residents to reinvent themselves as citizens instead of consumers of services. Civic engagement needs to become an everyday practice, embedded into city life at all levels of municipal and community activities;

(c) This is also a time for immense opportunity. Significant progress has been made in meeting many development challenges. Within the past generation, hundreds of millions of people have emerged from extreme poverty. Access to education has greatly increased for both boys and girls. The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, bridge the digital divide and develop knowledge societies;

(d) There are more than 7 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide, up from 738 million in 2000. Globally, 3.2 billion people are using the Internet, of which two billion live in developing countries. Mobile broadband penetration globally was close to 47 per cent in 2015, a value that has increased 12-fold since 2007. In 2015, 69 per cent of the global population will be covered by 3G mobile broadband, up from 45 per cent in 2011;

(e) Local governments are changing the way they govern in the twenty-first century. Information and communications technology-assisted approaches can support and strengthen government, in part by enhancing transparency through open data and by improving citizen access to services through online platforms.

7. In the light of the foregoing:

(a) We need to harness the best and brightest ideas and people to meet the challenges we face. Our cities have to become the engine to bring these two together, creating the climate for involvement and innovation and facilitating the processes and platforms. The challenge for future cities is not only technology and data manipulation but, even more so, governance and civic engagement. Our cities

should again be democratic arenas, and our residents will reinvent themselves as citizens instead of consumers of services. Civic engagement needs to become an everyday practice, embedded into city life at all levels of municipal and community activities;

(b) Cities need to continue and explore "smart" opportunities, analysing technological capabilities, social network capacities, Internet of things infrastructure and crowd mobilization. We have to better understand the potential of smart cities as democratic arenas for citizen empowerment, as governance platforms, and user-driven innovation. Smart endeavours need to generate sustainable mechanisms that will enable citizens to develop capacity and experience in civic responsibility and broaden democratic platforms and responsible governance;

(c) We recognize that while elections form the basis of local democracy, citizen engagement can take many forms and utilize ongoing practices and mechanisms. Municipal-community partnerships can be just as important to the robustness of local democracy, which should be built upon a broad range of opportunities for public involvement and engagement, going far beyond elections;

(d) We acknowledge that dialogue is the building block of citizen engagement, the most colourful and innovative role in the unfolding story of local democracy. Dialogue brings forth the community attributes of democracy, demonstrating that, in many countries, citizens draw on tradition and custom, making creative use of village councils to voice their opinions and deliberate;

(e) We need to continue widening the democratic scale, deepening the modality of participation, in such tools as the ballot initiative, referendums and participatory budgeting. Participatory local democracy is widely perceived as fostering better accountability and improved delivery of basic services, as well as defusing regional, ethnic and religious tensions;

(f) We realize that connectivity and transparency have been shown to be enormously significant to creating interaction and providing governance. Certainly, the advent of new technology and media promises new possibilities for enhancing civic participation and engagement. A smart city is therefore two things: data-rich and interconnected;

(g) We appreciate that the new public agora is emerging through the Internet. The web has been identified as a platform that supplies new possibilities for an interactive virtual public arena that enables top-down efforts to shape cities through continuous bottom-up participation. New media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are the new enablers of multidirectional information flows, in a faster and broader way than ever before, allowing more and more individuals, especially young people, to engage with their city;

(h) We embrace the wide diversity of our cities as the heart of civic engagement. We recognize that while technology opens immense opportunities it also has the potential to distance residents and leave them outside the participation sphere. We commit our endeavours to bridging the digital divide and ensuring accessibility to the civic arena to all citizens.

Recommendations

Adopting a smart civic engagement strategy

8. We undertake to persistently act to create a climate that facilitates the formation of collaborations between residents, business establishments, third sector organizations and the municipality, while making use of cutting-edge technologies that enable learning, creativity and sharing to achieve social and economic prosperity.

9. We propose that smart civic engagement should be embedded in the strategic framework and vision for the city, as central guidelines to leverage development and well-being. Smart civic engagement, in fact, can be effectively used in strategic urban planning. Strategic urban planning is a cyclical process that enables a city plan to be under continuous review to meet the evolving needs and aspirations of the citizens of the city, while providing decision-makers with an extremely useful tool.

10. We recommend that, while planning for our cities, we take into account the need to continually build citizen trust and capacity, which is at the core of the plan and ensuing actions. Transparency and continual participation, together with the early implementation of projects and/or programmes arising from the plan, helps to build public confidence in its merits, while at the same time strengthening the municipality's problem-solving capacity.

11. We emphasize the importance of the following principles as a basis for planning with smart civic engagement:

(a) A multidisciplinary approach: many aspects of city life should be addressed;

(b) Wide public participation: representatives of the city's residents and other stakeholders should be closely involved in the plan's formulation;

(c) Consensus-building: the process should be designed to help various interest groups to reach consensus over a wide range of themes and issues;

(d) Early completion: the plan should be produced in a relatively short amount of time;

(e) Early formulation of action plans: action plans, designed to different time scales, should be produced for implementation, while the strategic plan is still in preparation, which helps to build confidence in its value;

(f) Transparent planning process: the public should be enabled to follow the plan's evolution on the municipal website and through other media;

(g) Empowerment of the municipality: the plan should provide the municipality with new tools to guide urban development in a smart and sustainable way, while meeting the needs and aspirations of its citizens.

Vision of a citizen-centred municipality

12. We recommend that the vision underpinning the city plans call for a local governance model in which citizens are at the heart of its objectives. Citizen welfare should be at the heart of a citizen-centred municipality. The services supplied must

reflect professionalism, excellence and honesty. Staff members must be loyal to the municipality and its mission and attentive to the needs of individuals, groups and communities, as well as possess a sense of commitment to provide the best possible services to all.

Civic engagement becoming the norm

13. We emphasize that the success of a city plan is its coherence, with each line being continuously developed, creating the necessary mechanisms for implementation and a continuously growing municipal toolbox.

14. We encourage a corporate culture that supports public participation and support the diverse municipal units in implementing participatory processes.

15. We advocate public dialogue as a normative operating mode of the municipal units, a two-way action, both responding to bottom-up initiatives and introducing top-down actions.

Creating multiple platforms for continuous civic engagement

16. We recommend extensive investment in developing tools and integrating the concept of public participation in the municipalities, including:

(a) Physical planning processes: to develop methodologies and procedures regarding notification and public participation in planning processes;

(b) Dialogue programmes: to develop briefs and guidelines for conducting community and neighbourhood meetings and programmes;

(c) Digital and social media tools: to develop innovative platforms for public engagement and participation;

(d) Training: to implement training programmes for municipal staff involved in public participation and training programmes, workshops, seminars and personal coaching for senior executives in the municipality;

(e) Virtual working environment: to develop municipal portals where employees can share knowledge and information about the concepts and processes of public participation;

(f) Municipal workplans: to promote public participation in decision-making and set this as a target in municipal objectives and workplans.

Smart civic engagement

17. We recommend persistently pursuing the utilization of cutting-edge technologies to enable learning, creativity and sharing in order to achieve social and economic prosperity. Smart technologies should become an integral part of the city civic engagement framework, emphasizing smart engagement in decision-making processes and the wisdom of the crowd as a means for effective municipal management in the new age.

18. We also recommend striving to use the technological and social tools available to the city to enable better use of information and communications technologies to streamline the management of existing resources, save on energy costs, provide improved service, enhance the quality of life and fulfil the objectives of the sustainable city concept.